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## After job loss, family trying to rebound

Kevin Towe returned to school for a new career path and is now a licensed practical nurse

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By Margo Rutledge Kissell  
 Staff Writer

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When Kevin Towe passed his state test to become a licensed practical nurse, the first thing his 6-year-old daughter said was, "We can go to Bob Evans after church again?"

That weekly trip was one of the luxuries the family of six cut after he lost his manufacturing job.

It was a big adjustment for everyone, especially him.

"You wake up and you don't have to go to work. It's just like your whole world ends," he said. "You get depressed. You're anxious. You don't know what to do and then your whole life has to start all over."

His wife, Kimberly, said it felt like they lost part of themselves when their comfortable lifestyle abruptly changed. "We established who we are," she said, "and we weren't those people any more."

Bonnie Parrish, executive director of the nonprofit Family Service Association, has seen dozens of families struggle with the same issues. The agency at 184 Salem Ave. offers counseling to displaced workers and their families to help work through the grief process and rebuild their self worth.

"It destroys how they feel about themselves," she said, adding that starting over can be very difficult for those in the hard-hit manufacturing industry.

"It's very scary for them to think of doing something different," Parrish said.

Towe decided to go back to school to become a licensed practical nurse because he thought he'd find the work rewarding based on his experience of caring for his own children and dealing with their medical issues.

Back in 2003, during a six-month layoff from Delphi, he had become certified as a state tested nursing assistant. But when he was called back to work, he shelved those plans and the license lapsed.

His wife encouraged him when he doubted whether he could handle the fast-paced, 11-month LPN program at the Miami Valley Career Technology Center, where students were required to maintain an 80 percent grade-point average.

"I think it's easy for people who are in the middle of it to get

discouraged and want to quit," she said. "They need people that are going to be beside them that are going to push them forward and not stop."

When he showed up for classes at the center's Greenville campus, he found others who were starting over, too. They bonded into a tight-knit group.

"In my class of 24, there were probably at least six over the age of 30 that were doing a total career change."

Routines were changing in the Towe home as well.

Kimberly was developing her hobby into a part-time portrait business at home, which allowed her to work around the kids' schedules and her husband's.

He became "Mr. Mom," doing the laundry and shuttling the kids around when he wasn't in class or doing clinicals two days a week.

Throughout, they wondered if they would be able to stay afloat while going through the adjustment. Unemployment benefits helped, but still only brought in about half of what he made at Delphi, he said.

The couple refused to seek government aid such as food stamps, but did seek help from local churches, including their own Eaton Church of the Brethren, when they had trouble making ends meet.

They discovered Angel Food Ministries sites where, for \$30 a month, the family could receive \$60 worth of groceries.

After he lost his medical insurance, they had to pay everything out of pocket. At times he had to approach relatives when their daughter needed a prescription he couldn't afford.

They also contacted their creditors to tell them what they were going through after they fell behind on their mortgage and other bills.

While the mortgage company extended the length of their loan, it dropped their interest rate by 2 percent to 3.75 percent, lowering the monthly payment by almost \$400.

"They were more than willing to work with us in finding a solution to our problem," he said.

Towe completed the nursing program in December and by March had passed the computerized state test. Two days later, he received his license in the mail, but he still had to find a job.

He applied at 25 businesses and found most of them weren't hiring. When he entered the Vandalia Park Nursing Center, an assistant director of nursing interviewed him on the spot after some positions had come open. Days later, he was offered a full-time job, working nights three times a week.

"Finding a job was a relief," he said. "Not being able to provide for my family has been really hard for me."

It affected their kids, too, his wife said.

"I see a change in how the children look at him now that they know he's back at work. There's an appreciation there," she said. "The biggest one I see it with is my 5-year-old who says, 'My daddy's back at work.'"

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